

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio
Additional Estimates Hearing 2011-12
15 February 2012

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Merbein Facility

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 15 February 2012, pages 8-9)

QUESTION No.: AI-5

Senator McKENZIE: Absolutely. I notice on your website, when we look at the focus of the research around the CSIRO and horticulture, we have cereals, cotton, wine grapes, oil seeds, legumes and sugar cane. Whereas there is a glaring gap, I guess, in aspects of your research into the horticultural industries that hold up northeast and northwest Victoria and that are under irrigation. So if you could take on notice in terms of assuring regional Victorians from the north that the CSIRO is still going to be driving innovation in their particular industry, that would be fantastic.

Dr Clark: We have diminished our investment in some of those horticulture areas and in some of the areas of table grapes. So I will not be able to provide assurance, but I will be able to provide you with the actual information.

Senator McKENZIE: The facts will be fine. Great.

ANSWER

With the closure of the Merbein facility, research into the genetic improvement of horticultural crops has been reduced. However, while CSIRO has moved out of table and dried grapes and citrus, it is increasing efforts in understanding rootstock – scion interactions and hence ways of improving the adaptability and performance of a range of horticultural species that rely on rootstocks. This will assist in resisting the effects of water deficits and increasingly saline soils, counter a range of soil pests especially nematodes and use available water more efficiently.

CSIRO also works extensively on the sustainability of agricultural practices, including improved resource use efficiencies and innovative on-farm management practices that protect natural resource assets. Much of this research is applicable in northwest and northeast Victoria.